

Brass City Charter School

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Greetings Chairs McCrory and Currey, ranking members Berthel and McCarty, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Barbara Ruggiero and I am the co-founder and Executive Director of Brass City Charter School in Waterbury. I am submitting testimony today in support of SB 1096: An Act Concerning the School School Approval Process.

BCCS, which opened in 2013, is Waterbury's only charter school. After going through a rigorous application process, which included both a local public hearing and a hearing at the State Board of Education, we were approved, given our charter and the initial funding needed to open to our first cohort of students in grades Pre-K through 3. Once we were approved, we had just two months to announce our opening to the public. Despite the fact that we were an unknown, untested commodity, we ended our first lottery with a waitlist. Last year we had over 600 students on our waitlist and with each year that list grows. It was clear that families wanted a choice for their children. Throughout CT the demand for public charter schools has rapidly increased over the past two years. The latest waitlist includes over six thousand names, representing the families demanding access to these schools. To reiterate, public charter schools provide quality education to students who often don't have access to great schools.

After 2015, the approval process for opening a new charter school shifted away from how it was when BCCS opened. Schools that were approved after 2015 have to go through a two-step authorization process where the SBE grants them an initial certificate or approval, rather than their charter. In order for schools to receive their charter and be able to begin the process of recruiting staff and students, the school must have funding appropriated to them through the Connecticut legislature. This process can leave approved schools hanging in limbo for years.

SB 1096 reverts the charter school approval process back to the way it operated prior to 2015, the way it was when BCCS opened. This is the process that made it possible for our school to

open in the same year we were approved. One of the current barriers new charter schools face after being approved is getting initial funding allocated through the legislature. In addition to removing the current 2-step authorization barriers, SB 1096 creates a non-lapsings account within the general fund to provide approved charters with initial funding in a timely manner. BCCS supports this legislation but recommends that the effective date be set back to 2015 so that schools currently stuck in the process can receive their charter, as well as new schools currently going through the approval process. Additionally, we would like to see an annual RFP released for new charter schools so that more Connecticut children can have access to a seat at a high-quality public charter school in their community.

Thank you for your consideration.

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